

A New Frontier of Social Influence: Portable Social Graphs

insight

Shiv Singh, Ray Velez, and Jesse Pickard | August 2008

razorfish.

The explosive growth of social networks across all age demographics is largely because of our social graphs. It's the mapping of who is connected to whom within a network of peers. And as a result, people are increasingly surfing the social networks and the broader web through the context of their friends and acquaintances—what those friends talk about, what they recommend, and what they consider to be relevant.

Two years ago, this online behavior was not that common online. That's changing now. According to a *Fast Company* magazine article, the affect of the social graph on marketing is going to be even greater than that of radio, the telegraph, or television. We tend to agree.

So what are we talking about? Whether it is in Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Bebo or any other social network, the relationships that a person has with his or her friends, and the conversations among them, drives their online behavior. The greatest persuasion and influence takes place in the millions of conversations among friends and acquaintances as others voyeuristically peer in. One example of this changing dynamic—social network users are three times more likely to trust their peers' opinions over advertising when making purchasing decisions according to JupiterResearch.

Another thought to consider is how search engines like Google use links from the social web to drive the prioritization of website listings in search results pages. Those links are created socially through the blogs, comments and tags of individual people. In a sense they're the footprints of the social graph. What people do online and how they recognize each other for their contributions through cross-linking drives natural search engine results.

A Transformative Opportunity

But with the OpenSocial initiative developed jointly by Google, MySpace, Six Apart, Plaxo, Friendster and Yahoo as well as Facebook Connect and Microsoft's own data portability initiatives, this discussion moves beyond the realm of marketing within a social network to allowing for social influence to take place on any Web site in a meaningful fashion. And not just influence among anonymous peers but of friends and acquaintances that know and respect each other. Now your own corporate or ecommerce Web site, can act like a mini-social network. A place where consumers can influence their peers or solicit advice from them.

We're not asking you to plug in social network features to your Web site and invest dollars in promoting yet another disconnected community. Rather, with OpenSocial Facebook Connect and the Microsoft initiatives, you can bring a consumer's existing social graph to your Web site. Imagine that – your Web site being a location where a consumer can see and participate with his *existing* network of peers as he makes brand affinity and purchasing decisions about you.

Unknown peer influencers also stand to become more influential through these services. A third-party website will be able to take profile data like region, age, gender, and interests and match it to any action (review, comment, purchase, etc). This means that you will be able to see the user-generated content of people like yourself. A car review from a person who shares your region and age is much more relevant and informative than that of a completely unknown person. A recent Edelman report confirms the importance of this with 68% of people trusting “people like themselves”, up from 22% in 2003. This allows for that to happen.

So let’s look at a hypothetical example using Facebook Connect to see how this may work.

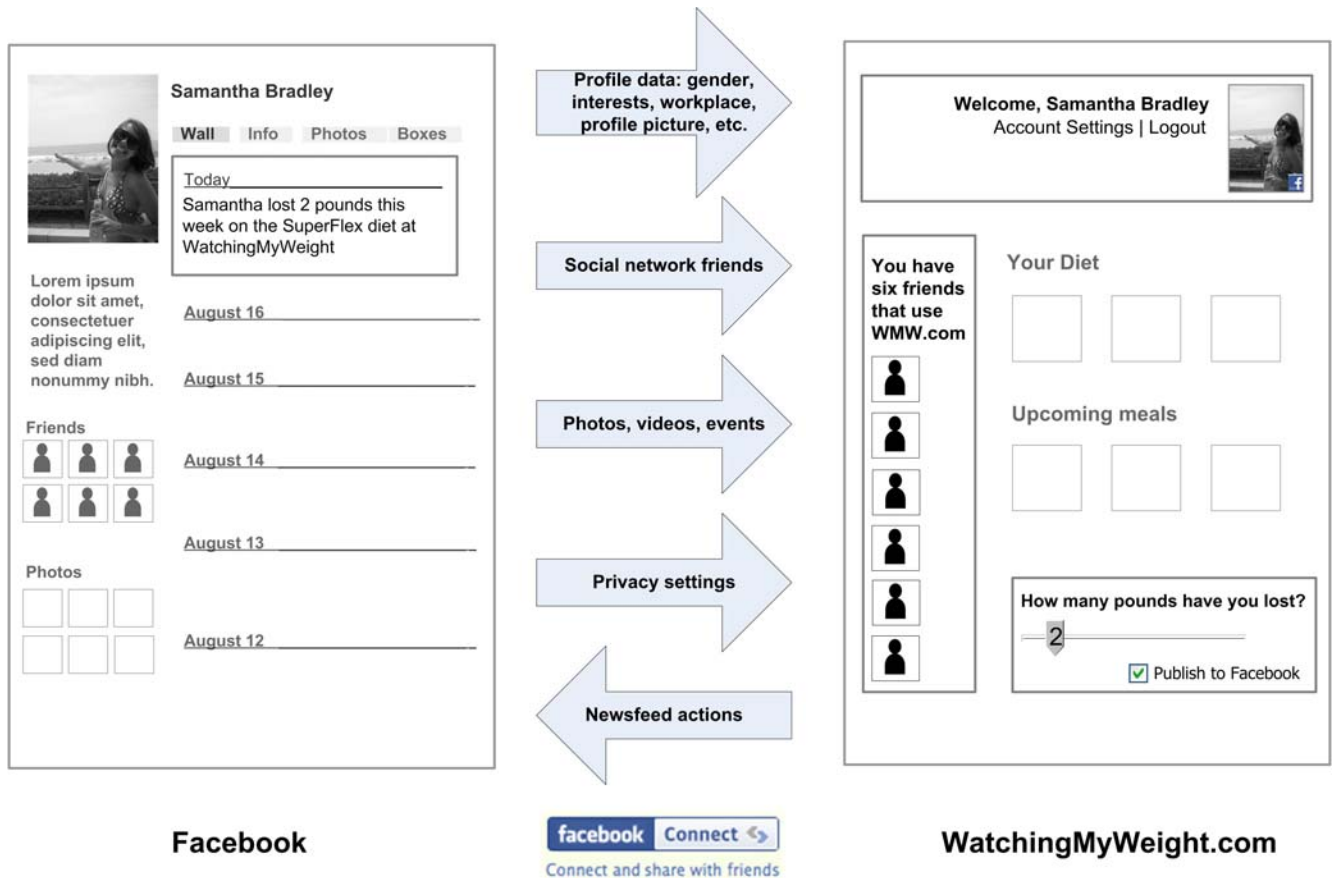
The Diet Scenario

Samantha is interested in getting in shape for the summer and decides to go to [Watchingmyweight.com](#) (name fictitious) to look into their programs.

1. On Samantha’s first visit to [Watchingmyweight.com](#) she clicks the “Connect Using Facebook” button to forgo the registration process.
2. Using Samantha’s profile data from Facebook, [Watchingmyweight.com](#) automatically presents a selection of diet and exercise programs that are appropriate for her age, gender and climate. It also recognizes that Samantha has an interest in soccer and makes sure to include that sport in recommended daily activities.
3. Samantha reviews each of the programs that [Watchingmyweight.com](#) has suggested for her. There are hundreds of reviews for each program, but since she is using Facebook Connect, Samantha sees that several of her friends in her Facebook social graph have written positive reviews for the SuperFlex Program. She even sees that one of her friends, Kelly, is currently on SuperFlex. She trusts the opinions of her friends and selects that program.
4. Samantha is now a week into the SuperFlex program. She chooses to have her activity automatically publish to her Facebook newsfeed so her friends can keep her motivated. Her friends see that Samantha is doing well, as a newsfeed post says that “Samantha has lost 2 pounds this week.”
5. The experience is also enhanced because Facebook connect allows Samantha to engage with her friend Kelly on the [Watchingmyweight.com](#) site. Samantha sees how she compares to Kelly’s progress. She also schedules exercise dates with Kelly that are automatically published to the Facebook calendar.
6. In addition to engaging with Kelly, Samantha also tracks how she is progressing compared to other people on the SuperFlex program. Facebook Connect allows her to compare herself to people who share her region, age, and gender—all made available through Facebook profile data.
7. Samantha decides that she wants to buy one of the recommended books on [Watchingmyweight.com](#). But at \$35, it is quite expensive. Samantha decides to ping Julie, a friend of hers who’s read several books on losing weight, to find out if she’s read

it too. By simply choosing Julie from her list of friends on the Watchingmyweight.com site, she's able to ask her the question directly and have the response sent to her cell phone.

8. During the entire process, Facebook Connect automatically makes use of her pre-defined Facebook privacy settings by restricting any of her co-workers from seeing her Watchingmyweight-related activity.



Making Sense of it All

Influencing conversations or having a brand inserted into them is a challenge that marketers and their agencies have been trying to crack. We've been advising our clients on Social Influence Marketing™ and more specifically on how to allow for the peer influence to take place – to provide the catalysts for people to talk about your brand at every stage of the marketing funnel, whether they are buying a product or providing advice to others on it.

But now with the portability of the social graph, it's getting easier for Social Influence Marketing to happen elsewhere on the web – on your own Web site in a way that provides more value to your potential customers, enabling them to form more honest relationships with you and make more informed purchasing decisions about your products and services as they navigate the web with their social graphs.

Special thanks to the social media community at Razorfish whose conversations and insights were the basis of this article.

About the Authors



Shiv Singh has been with Razorfish since 1999 and has worked in its Boston, New York, San Francisco and London offices. Before that, he ran a small web consulting firm. Shiv helps Razorfish clients leverage digital technologies to develop meaningful and value-driven customer and employee relationships. As Vice President Social Media & Global Strategic Initiatives, he leads Razorfish's foray into Social Influence Marketing and is responsible for capability development, advising clients, partnerships, evangelism and experimentation. In addition to writing extensively on

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Prior to his current role, Shiv founded and led the Global Enterprise Solutions practice at Razorfish, and, before that, was a user experience practitioner. He completed his undergraduate studies at Babson College and conducted graduate research into social networks at the London School of Economics & Political Science. An active blogger, Shiv blogs at www.goingsocialnow.com and www.theappgap.com. His twitter id: sszd. Please share your insights or thoughts to shiv.singh@avenuea-razorfish.com.



Raymond Velez is the Vice President and Technology Lead for Razorfish, which has more than 450 technologists focused on web technology architecture and development. Ray's background includes senior technology architectural consulting in enterprise systems and architectures and strategic IT planning. He has deep experience in the entire application development lifecycle from application inception to application rollout. Ray has applied his expertise on several of Razorfish's largest implementations for clients and has trained and developed curriculums in various technologies and methodologies.

Highlights from Ray's work include architecting and developing the online presence for Major League Baseball and all 30 teams on a common platform with technologies such as Sun GlassFish, Interwoven, Oracle, RealNetworks, iSyndicate, iChat, Mzinga and Virage. In addition, Ray has architected and developed dashboards, intranets and technology infrastructure for corporations such as Pepsi and Thomson Financial.

Ray's experience includes thirteen years in technology, having served as a senior architectural consultant at Scient and Cambridge Technology Partners. He is a member of various professional associations, including IEEE and ACM.



Jesse Pickard has been with Razorfish since 2006 and currently serves as an Information Architect out of the New York office. He specializes in helping clients with all forms of Social Influence Marketing, including creating brand presences within social networks, community building and social shopping strategies. Jesse spends much of his time researching the ever-changing social media landscape and evangelizing the benefits of participating in the social web.

About Razorfish™

Razorfish is one of the largest interactive marketing and technology companies in the world, and also one of the largest buyers of digital advertising space. With a demonstrated commitment to innovation, Razorfish counsels its clients on how to leverage digital channels such as the Web, mobile devices, in-store technologies and other emerging media to engage people, build brand loyalty and provide excellent customer service. The company is increasingly advising marketers on Social Influence Marketing™, its approach for employing social media and social influencers to achieve the marketing and business needs of an organization. Its award-winning client teams provide solutions through their strategic counsel, digital advertising and content creation, media buying, analytics, technology and user experience. Razorfish has offices in markets across the United States, and in Australia, China, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom. Clients--many of them served in multiple markets--include Carnival Cruise Lines, Coors Brewing Company, Levi's, McDonald's and Starwood Hotels. Visit <http://www.razorfish.com> for more information.

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